critical digest

VOL. III No. 46 July 23, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

Digests of Current Reviews

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/7/49. Trade paper critics found the long run Rodgers and Hammerstein production remarkably fresh. Francis, Billboard, and Hobe, Variety, enjoyed Martha Wright's portrayal in the Mary Martin role. But they agreed that no one could be as perfect as the original. Roger Rico didn't fare as well. Reviewers complimented his fine voice, but felt he lacked personal magnetism of Pinza and Middleton. His lack of English made him difficult to understand. Diosa Costello, as Bloody Mary, pleased. While supporting cast remains fine. Hobe noted the show, staged by Joshua Logan, has been tightened advantageously.

Seventeen-Broadhurst, 6/21/51. Three widely diverse views expressed by weekly critics on Sally Benson's adaptation of the Booth Tarkington novel. Kerr, Commonweal, had a very good time, partly because of faithful adaptation and partly because of staging by Hassard Short. Minor reservations were lack of added comedy to bolster plot and lack of more dynamic youngsters in the lead. Kenneth Nelson and Ann Crowley give competent and engaging performances, but lack the special magic which could turn show into a memorable occasion. Crisler, Christian Science Monitor, felt production admirably fulfilled its purpose as a mild summer weight musical. But Marshall, Nation, would have none of it. Not only is script overburdened with nostalgia, but the poetic overtures it might have had are missing. Blame this on miscasting of Ann Crowley as Lola Pratt. She has a prosaic face, and looks like a contemporary glamor girl.

New York Critics in London

Chances of London hits success on Broadway predicted by Watts, Post. He is sure that the twin productions of the Oliviers Caesar and Cleopatra and Antony and Cleopatra will be Broadway hits when presented by Gilbert Miller. The Little Hut would succeed with Robert Morley and Joan Tetzel, but not with Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer. Waters of the Moon is too much like our The Autumn Garden, while The Love of Four Colonels might tend to confuse New Yorkers. Alec Guinness would need a better supporting cast to put over Hamlet.

Strawhat Tryouts

Infamous Angel, the script by Hardwick Neven chosen for a tryout at Putnam County NY, Playhouse, by Rice, Post, was panned by trade paper critics. McDonald, Billboard, thinks it might have a limited college audience, but the subject and dialogue are frequently too much over the average audience's head. Hobe, Variety, thought the play about Shelley was stilted and garrulous. He also found the playhouse primitive compared to other stock operations...Summersault, Irene Gawne's comedy starring Katherine Alexander and Royal Beal debuted at Dennis, Mass, Playhouse.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Next time the talk gets around to early curtains, let's consider an 8:00 or 8:15 PM. The suggested 7:00 or 7:30 PM schedules are compliments to the restaurant service in midtown New York that may not be deserved. A large percentage of the audience arrives at the theatre at 8:00 PM for an 8:45 PM curtain. Why not give the early birds a break?

Copyright 1951 by T.M.Kraus, 505 5th Ave., N.Y.17 MU 2-0326 $10 Yearly

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. World Telegram & Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. Newark News
11. Women's Wear Daily
12. Wall Street Journal
13. Journal of Commerce
14. George Jean Nathan
15. Ward Morehouse
16. Morning Telegraph
17. Variety
18. Billboard
19. Theatre Arts
20. New Leader
21. Freeman
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr. Science Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50	- Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29. None: 16-21-23-28.
CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50	- Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.
GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50	- Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.
GRAMERCY GHOST-4/23/51	- Con: 1-2-4-5-6-10-11-14-17-22-25-26-27-30. None: 13-15-16-19-20-21-23-24-28-29.
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	- Con: 28.
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	- Con: 28. None: 19-21.
KISS ME KATE-12/31/48	- Con: 29. None: 21-28.
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	- Con: 14-19. None: 21-25-28.
OKLAHOMA-5/29/51.	- None: 19-20-21-22-25-26-27-28-29-30.
THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51	- Con: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27. None: 12-20-22.
SEASON IN THE SUN-9/28/50	- Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10. None: 7-13-15-16-21.
SEVENTEEN-6/22/51	- Con: 2-4-7-26-27-28-30. None: 19-20-21-25-29.
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	- Con: 27. So-So: 23. None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.
STALAG 17-5/8/51	- Con: 4-20-23-28-30. So-So: 3. None: 19-21.
A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51	- Con: 2-7-14-18-20-25-27-28. None: 15-19-21.

' TV & Radio Notes '

Brown, Saturday Review, signed by Marshall-Hester Productions to host TV series "Treasure House of Adventure" which will be prepared in association with American Museum of Natural History...Gardner, Herald-Tribune, to be featured in series of 13 TV films titled "Pathe Highlights" which feature bits on unusual personalities and amus-feature items...Nick Kenny, Mirrow, will emcee Wednesday 11:00 PM NBC TV variety show ...WOR TV Curtain Calls, featuring Ethel Colby, Journal of Commerce, plans to return in the fall.

Tony Martin, Robert Alda, Isabel Bigley, Jimmy Durante, Martha Raye, Patti Page, Bob Hope and Frankie Laine, sub for ABC Walter Winchell this summer...Old Vic denies report it will appear on TV in USA...Judy Holliday told about life backstage in summer stock on NBC "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow"...Oscar Levant bowed off CBS TV theatre quiz, "Guest House," after two shows..."Big Little Show" will adapt Broadway hits for half hour TV versions...Russian television devotes one third of time to theatre program, reports Schwartz, Times, by televising hits with current casts from small studios...Equity rejected Vinton Freedley's request seeking concession from full week salary rule for actors who present scenes from show on TV...Brown Shoe Company to sponsor ABC TV "Say It With Acting"charade quiz...ABC has leased Times Hall as TV studio.

' Green Room Department '

ASHTON STEVENS...Death of the dean of American critics, 78 year old reviewer of Chicago Herald American, was cited as the loss of the friendliest of the breed. Watts, Post, doubts if there was ever a critic as widely loved by colleagues and theatre fans. Lyons, Post, remarked that Stevens managed after 50 years of reviewing to make and keep more friends than any other critic.

COLUMN TIPS...Palace may house legit shows in the fall, hears Walker...Ridge Bond, Oklahoma, being considered for Russell Nype role in Call Me Madam, reports Wilson...Robert Alda's understudy quit Guys and Dolls because the star is too healthy, says Kilgallen.

COLUMBIA CONDEMNED...Failure of Columbia University to actually set up its much heralded School of Drama program chided by Coleman, Mirror. The university should recognize its duty in the theatre capital of the world. Glenn Hughes, University of Washington, would be a good choice to set up a department, the critic suggested.

BARD IN CONN...American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy charter signing by Governor Lodge praised by Times and Herald-Tribune editorials. Though much depends on the skill with which the enterprise is managed, pointed out the Herald-Tribune, no one can say that the opportunity provided is less than magnificent. The theatre, scheduled to be completed in 1952, will do much to provide a broader base for appreciating the Bard, remarks the Times.

CASTING AID...Next time Rodgers and Hammerstein want to cast the leading male role in South Pacific, they can audition two choices picked by critics. Sylvester, News, recommends French night club singer Jacques Pils, now at La Vie En Rose. While Watts, Post, thinks movie actor George Sander would be perfect.

GOOD INTENTIONS...Critics mass choosing of Darkness At Noon and Billy Budd as best plays of the season is perfect example of picking for good intentions rather than actual theatrical merits, comments Kerr, Commonweal. At award-giving time many a critic finds himself choked up by what he now recognizes as conspicuous good will and noble endeavor. Thus he votes for the play which had previously bored him to death. Contemporary audiences do abide by professional critical opinion. The tentative playgoer who followed their opinion on these plays is now probably at home in front of his TV set.

CRITICS & PLAYWRIGHTS...Criticism calls for entirely different qualities of mind and talent than those demanded in the playwright, reminds Watts, Post, in disputing recent review by North, WT&S, of Atkinson's "Once Around the Sun." Playwrights see all plays in terms of the way they would have written them, not as they were actually written.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Jack Lait, Mirror, subbing for vacationing Walter Winchell for eight weeks... Coleman, Mirror, reports warm response from readers sending theatre books to Ward 14, Veterans Hospital, Palo Alto, California...Michael O'Shea, press agent, plans musical comedy based on autobiography of hair stylist "Antoine"...Critics' Circle first fall session held at Algonquin Hotel in mid-September...Kronenberger, Time, vacationing at Conn. summer home...Ridgewood, N.J. Shakespeare Festival cancelled due to lack of funds...Three thousand, six hundred and five permits issued last year allowing children to perform...Margaret Webster resigned from ANTA board...Arts of the Theatre Foundation, 521 West 43rd Street, NYC, accepting manuscripts fro $4,000 in prizes.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

ALONZO BOSAN...Seventeen actor, who is currently stealing the show with his single appearance onstage, told Rice, Post, that he was just born to be on somebody's stage. He decided to enter show business as a band member when he found out they were allowed to sleep late. Bosan has been in only seven plays, though he was in many minstrel shows. Now 65, he has been in show business since 1905.

MAURICE ZOLOTOW..."No People Like Show People" author turned his magazine profiles into the Random House book because he was always interested in the psychological urges which drove the eight stars to the height of fame, he explained to WNBT Ben Grauer. The magazine pieces had to be superficial and anecdotal; the book could be more psychological. His theory is that the stars' terrific drive is a result of their feeling of insecurity without any realistic foundation.

BARRY NELSON...The Moon Is Blue juvenile believes the most courageous thing he ever did was to get married in Boston before reading the notices of his current play, Sheaffer, Eagle, discovered. The young actor finds it difficult to keep fresh in his long part in the three character play. You must bring something to it, a sort of effervescence.

' Digests of Past Hits '

Counsellor At Law, Elmer Rice's popular play, opened November 7, 1931 at the Plymouth Theatre. Several weeks earlier Rice's The Left Bank opened at the Little Theatre. Both were staged, directed and presented by the author. Paul Muni, star of the Yiddish theatre, made his Broadway debut in Counsellor. Jennie Moscowitz, Anna Kestant and Constant McKay headed a large supporting cast. The play closed for the summer and reopened on September 13, 1933. Broadway's most recent revival featured Muni and Moscowitz in 1942.

Though most credited Muni's acting for providing an interesting evening, most of the critics were lukewarm on the merits of the script. With sole exception of Stark Young, New Republic, they were sure it wasn't as good as Street Scene. Young disagreed, feeling that it was better because Rice didn't try to prove heavy truths. Brown, Post, and Skinner, Commonweal, filed "con" votes. The overabundance of unnecessary details injured the script.

Many who wrote favorable reviews suggested that Rice could edit and speed up his play by doing away with some of these details. Ibee, Variety, placed the blame on Rice's false economy in not having out of town or preview openings. Benchley, New Yorker, was sure that Rice could edit the script into the interesting play it really was. Atkinson, Times, found it a remarkably engrossing play with Muni at the top of his form. Hammond, Herald-Tribune; Gabriel, American; and Hutchens, Theatre Arts, thought the electric combination of Muni and Rice should have turned in a more exciting work. Garland, World-Telegram, considered it one grand characterization, grandly acted.

' Legit Stuff '

Shows that closed include Courtin' Time...Chapman, News, Coleman, Mirror, and Garland, Journal-American, to lecture at Lake Tarleton, N.H. "Seven Arts Festival"... Stern, Show Business, to make one month tour of summer theatres...Tighe, Theatre Arts, may have musical comedy The Dooley Girl presented by Eddie Dowling...Hobe, Variety, vacationing at home...Florida Freibus, associate editor of Equity Magazine, starred in Legend of Sarah at Stockbridge, Mass, Playhouse.